

INDIA COMMITTED TO ENHANCE REGIONAL COOPERATION: S JAISHANKAR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: BIMSTEC and India

'I am delighted that the Member States have finalized the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity which is expected to be adopted at the fifth BIMSTEC Summit,' S Jaishankar said

India on Thursday hailed an initiative to create a connectivity master plan linking countries in South and Southeast Asia, and urged the speedy conclusion of a coastal shipping pact, besides another agreement allowing motor vehicles to ply via member countries.

Addressing the 17th BIMSTEC ministerial meeting, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said India was committed to increase regional cooperation within the grouping.

Besides India, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), includes Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. Formed in the 1990s, the group remained dormant for many years till it was revived a few years ago as an alternative to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which despite having the potential, has not been able to move forward due to frictions between India and Pakistan.

In 2016, India had invited leaders of the BIMSTEC grouping for an extended session of the BRICS leaders summit. In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited leaders of the group to his swearing in after retaining power in the national polls to underline India's commitment to the grouping.

Over the years, BIMSTEC has emerged as a promising sub-regional alternative to ensure growing strategic and economic interests of its member states as well as the international community in the Bay of Bengal region, Jaishankar said.

"India remains committed to further building the momentum of regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework and make the organization stronger, vibrant, more effective and result-oriented," he added.

The Indian foreign minister also said that "robust" linkages were "an essential pre-requisite for economic integration of the region with smooth cross-border movement of people and goods".

"I am delighted that member states have finalized the BIMSTEC master plan for transport connectivity which is expected to be adopted at the fifth BIMSTEC Summit," Jaishankar said. "It would be an important step towards fulfilling the aspirations of the people of our region for better connectivity and integration. We also need to put in place a legal framework for smooth connectivity in the region by finalizing the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the Motor Vehicles Agreement at an early date" he added.

Jaishankar also hailed Sri Lanka's initiative to organize the fifth BIMSTEC leaders' summit soon.

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